

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 4, 2001

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Sample The Spectrum
Seasonal Fruits and Vegetables are Coming Down the Runway

(Bethesda, MD)--Move over Gucci and Donna Karan. This season, all eyes are on Yves St. L'Orange, Versquashi, and Calvin Lime!

It's time to get fashionable, says the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) 5 A Day for Better Health Program. Be a fashion plate: you'll look better, feel fitter, and your friends will be green with envy. Just dress your plate in the designer colors of spring and summer's fruits and vegetables. Color your daily diet with bright oranges (carrots, mandarin oranges, sweet potatoes and mango), deep reds (tomatoes, cherries and strawberries), dark greens (broccoli, asparagus and kale), beautiful blues and purples (blueberries, eggplant and plums), and accent it with sunshine yellow (squash, pineapple and corn).

"Color, color, color is the rule to live by," advises Gloria Stables, M.S., R.D., director of the NCI's 5 A Day for Better Health Program. "The more reds, oranges, greens, yellows, and blues you see on the plate, the more health promoting properties you are getting from your fruit and vegetable choices."

There are more reasons to eat the rainbow than aesthetics, Ms. Stables points out. Nutrition research shows that colorful fruits and vegetables contain essential nutrients, vitamins and phytochemicals that improve health, help you feel more energetic, and may reduce your risk of cancer. Here are the specifics...

REDS

When you add deep reds or bright pinks to your daily diet, you are also adding a powerful antioxidant called lycopene. Lycopene is found in tomatoes, red and pink grapefruit, watermelon and guava. A diet rich in lycopene has been suggested to reduce the risk of select cancers, including prostate cancer.

The essentials: Creamy Tomato-Pepper Pasta

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GREENS

Your mom said “Eat your greens.” The National Cancer Institute says “Eat your greens.” You probably tell your family “Eat your greens.” But do you know why this color is so essential to your diet? Not only do these vegetables look great and taste wonderful, but they are rich in the phytochemicals that keep you healthy. For example, the carotenoids—lutein and zeaxanthin—that are found in spinach, collards, kale and broccoli have antioxidant properties that protect your eyes by keeping your retina strong. Also, research shows that green cruciferous vegetables (like cabbage, brussel sprouts, cauliflower, kale and turnips) may reduce the risk of cancerous tumors!

The essentials: Broccoli & Green Beans with Ginger Green Sauce (recipe included)

ORANGES

Orange, the color of a blazing sun, is a must-have in your daily diet. Orange fruits and vegetables like sweet potatoes, mangos, carrots, and apricots, include beta carotene. This carotenoid is a natural antioxidant and enhances your immune system. In addition to being a powerful health-protector, the orange group is rich in Vitamin C and Vitamin E. Folate, most often found in leafy greens, is also found in orange fruits and vegetables and is a vitamin B that may help prevent some birth defects. With a chemical make-up this good for you, the orange group should always be part of your daily diet.

The essentials: Curried Rice with Roasted Carrots and Apricots (recipe included)

YELLOW

Bright yellows have many of the same perks as the orange groups: high in essential vitamins and carotenoids. Pineapple, for example, is rich with Vitamin C, manganese, and the natural enzyme, bromelain. Bromelain is great to add to a meal to aid in digestion and reduce bloating. Additionally, corn and pears are high in fiber. Yellow fruits and vegetables belong to many different families, but they all share the common bond of health enhancing and great taste.

The essentials: Springtime Corn & Squash Soup (recipe included)

BLUES/PURPLES

Blues and purples not only add beautiful shades of tranquility and richness to your plate, they add health-enhancing flavonoids, phytochemicals, and antioxidants. Anthocyanins, a phytochemical, are pigments responsible for the blue color in fruits and vegetables, and they may help defend against harmful carcinogens. Blueberries, in particular, are rich in Vitamin C and folic acid and high in fiber and potassium.

The essentials: Fresh Berries with Sweet Vinegar Sauce (recipe included)

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SAVOR THE SPECTRUM OF THE SEASON

This is not a single-color season. When it comes to your health, there is no such thing as clashing colors. In fact, color contrasts can really complement your health-improving efforts. Blue does go with orange...anyone who has mixed fresh blueberries with a can of mandarin oranges can tell you that. Green and red are opposite on the color wheel, but when green and red peppers are sautéed together, opposites attract! Dressing your plate with the brightest, wildest color combinations is an essential part of being the model of perfect health.

So be a fashion plate. The best, and healthiest one is the most colorful one. Splashes of red and orange should accent spreads of green and yellow. This season, get your “5 A Day” the colorful way!

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The 5 A Day program is a joint initiative of the National Cancer Institute and the Produce for Better Health Foundation to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables to at least five servings daily for better overall health. For more recipes and ideas on how to color your daily diet with fruits and vegetables, check out the 5 A Day web site at www.5aday.gov.